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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 002479

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: SIKSEK ON SECURITY STAFFING, PROGRESS

Classified By: Political Counslor Norman H. Olsen for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) ConGen Jerusalem cleared this message.

Summary

2. (C) In conversations over several days in early April, Brigadier General Samir Siksek told Pol/C and poloff that the U.S. should keep steady pressure on Minister of Interior Nasir Yusif to carry out reforms, but that the U.S. should also take steps to loosen Finance Minister Salam Fayyad's tight grip on funds that are urgently required if the men in uniform on the ground are to acquire the tools to do their jobs. Siksek said that Yusif has thus far been lucky and able to capitalize on events -- such as the recent riots at the Muqatta'a to force President Abbas into supporting his reform efforts. This does not, however, make up for a lack of administrative skills and planning staff. "Everything is in his (Yusif's) head," according to Siksek. Siksek said he expects more personnel changes like the replacement of WB NSF commander Haj Isma'il Jabr with Nidal al-Asuli, adding that the Mukhabarrat will also be brought under Yusif's authority with or without its current head, Amin al-Hindi. Calling Preventive Security (PSO) head Rashid Abu Shbak "a system" rather than a person, Siksek predicted that integrating the PSO into Yusif's overall security portfolio will take much more time. End Summary.

New WB NSF Commander an Improvement

3. (C) Brigadier General Samir Siksek told Pol/C and poloff over the course of several conversations in early April that PA President Abbas and Interior Minister Nasir Yusif were correct to replace Haj Isma'il Jabr as head of the WB National Security Forces (NSF), as there was "no hope for him" as a commander. Siksek characterized Isma'il's replacement, Nidal al-Asuli, as "not the best", but wryly added that he would be an improvement over Jabr as commander. Siksek said that al-Asuli was born in Khan Yunis in 1946 and has a degree in mechanical engineering. He joined Fatah in 1966, and the Palestinian military in 1968, living in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon for the next two years. Al-Asuli completed unspecified military training in China in 1971, commando and infantry training in the then-USSR in 1982, and additional Soviet training in Yemen in 1983. A graduate of the Iraqi Command and Staff College, al-Assouli also completed anti-riot training in the Netherlands in 1994, and a course in advanced strategic studies in the UK in 2002.

4. (C) Siksek said that the attack on the Muqatta'a by armed elements seeking to disrupt a Fatah meeting there March 30-31 worked to Yusif's advantage, as it forced Yusif and President Abbas to act. Siksek called the subsequent firings in the West Bank a "big breakthrough," that helped push back against what he termed an "overdose of Israeli influence" there. He termed Jabr's ouster a sign that President Abbas intends to back Nasir Yusif, and claimed that he (Siksek) told the president that he needs to confirm Yusif's authority in writing. Yusif, if he is smart, will not accept being merely a figurehead, Siksek said. Yusif would not accept it from Prime Minister Quraya' previously, and should not accept it from the president now, Siksek said. (Comment: Curiously, Haj Isma'il Jabr was one of the few veteran security chiefs who was actively cooperating with Nasir Yusif. It is difficult to see how his ouster indicates any incremental increase in support for Yusif from Abu Mazen. End Comment)

Yusif a "Lousy Administrator"

5. (C) Continuing with his theme that Nasir Yusif is playing on lucky breaks on the ground, rather than any sort of coherent planning, Siksek called Yusif a "lousy administrator." Yusif has no chief of staff, Siksek claimed, and no team with planning capability: "Everything is in his head." He added, however, that he is hopeful that Yusif's contacts with General Ward will motivate him to get his ministerial house in order. Asked who could be tapped to provide the necessary administrative skills, Siksek said that former chief of the uniformed police in Gaza, Ghazi Jabali,

is capable, but lamented that Yusif will not take him because of his reputation for corruption, legendary throughout both the West Bank and Gaza. Siksek laughingly added, however, that Jabali is "an angel" compared to many others. He suggested that Presidential Security Advisor Jibril Rajoub, although very much "inferior even to Dahlan," could still end up with the some authority on security at Yusif's expense, if Yusif does not begin to act.

16. (C) President Abbas, in Siksek's view, has, in the aftermath of the Ramallah incidents, at last begun to talk tough about law and order, and Siksek advised the USG to keep up the pressure on both Yusif and Abbas to perform. Weekly meetings with the Ward team to track progress on reforms are a good place to start, Siksek said, further recommending that interlocutors stay focused on the mission rather than letting Yusif digress into politics. Siksek estimated that Yusif has until PLC elections in July to produce results. Failure could cost Yusif not only his job, he added, but also his position on the Central Committee of Fatah, whose party congress is scheduled for August.

Where Does This Leave Musa?

17. (C) Putting the conversation into a Gaza context, Siksek said that he had advised Nasir Yusif to "promote" Gaza strongman and current overall head of security operations there, Musa Arafat out of the picture, giving him some position in the Palestinian Ministry of Interior, such as undersecretary for Public Security) a grand title with little substance. Whether Arafat accepts the promotion or refuses, he will effectively be out of the way, Siksek said, stressing that President Abbas does not support Arafat. Arafat is so unpopular, Siksek said, that even arresting him would not arouse popular unrest, beyond a few small groups of Arafat loyalists who might seize a moment offered by his downfall to cause trouble. Siksek predicted, however, that most would-be troublemakers would be wise enough to see their own self-interest in refraining to act on Arafat's behalf. In a subsequent conversation, Siksek suggested that Arafat would be made subject to the mandatory retirement age of 60, thereby both forcing his departure and giving him a form of "cover" for leaving the service. Siksek speculated that estwhile chief of liaison activities with the IDF Ribhi Arafat would be tapped to take over Musa Arafat's role as the head of Public Security in Gaza.

Subordinating All Security Agencies

18. (C) Siksek predicted that Preventive Security (PSO) head Rashid Abu Shbak will retain his position, but that Mukhabarrat Chief Amin al-Hindi "cannot continue" in his current position. Al-Hindi "does nothing," Siksek lamented. "Anyone (else) would do better." Although he thought that Mukhabarrat staff might try to fight the placement of the Mukhabarrat under Minister Yusif's control, Siksek confidently predicted that the subordination will occur, "with or without al-Hindi." He later suggested that al-Hindi, whom he characterized as interested in turning his hand to private business, would, like Arafat, depart his post under the cover of the mandatory age-60 retirement rule. Returning to his assessment of Rashid Abu Shbak, Siksek said the PSO is another story, adding that "Abu Shbak is not a person, he is a system," making him far more difficult to remove. Abu Shbak hopes to add the title of West Bank PSO chief to his current Gaza credentials, and believes this is possible now that the GOI is allowing him to travel between Gaza and the West Bank, Siksek said.

19. (C) Siksek concluded that President Abbas will eventually subordinate the PSO under the Ministry of Interior as well, but that it will take more time. Siksek said that, at a recent meeting with Nasir Yusif, Abu Shbak was almost rude, refusing to rise from his chair to greet the minister. Siksek predicted that Yusif would ignore the insult for the short term, but will deal with Abu Shbak later, reflecting Yusif's approach of biding his time until he can work his way step by step through the tangle of loyalties and power in the PA security bodies.

Unhappy with Fayyad

10. (C) Siksek complained that PA Minister of Finance Salam Fayyad has "too tight a hold on the money" that Nasir Yusif needs to run the security services, and accused Fayyad of funneling money to Muhammad Dahlan under the table. The police, in particular, need resources to rebuild and refurbish work space, he said. Calling the recently-created inter-service units jointly patrolling in Ramallah a farce) the PA police have few weapons and almost no ammunition)

Siksek said that Yusif has no choice but to use NSF forces to support him "for the first few months" in the Ramallah area. Stressing again that the needs of the police can't wait, Siksek urged the U.S. to "rein in Fayyad."

Abu Ala'a: Help or Hindrance?

11. (C) Although Yusif reportedly expresses the view that PM Quraya' is supporting him, Siksek said he and many others believe that the PM is undermining Yusif's authority. Siksek said he believes that President Abbas will stay the course with Yusif, "at least for now," adding that PM Quraya' is also likely to remain in his position, since Quraya, "needs the protection his position offers from corruption scandals."

 Hamas and Hizballah

12. (C) Siksek said that, given the United States' tough stance against terrorism, Palestinians are uneasy that the U.S. is reportedly talking to Hamas and Hizballah in Lebanon. In Gaza, Siksek said, the Hamas training camps are full and the organization is still importing arms. He claimed to not know whether recent IDF reports that militants had imported surface-to-air missiles into Gaza are true, but claimed that, to his knowledge, for the past year there have been at least eight of what he termed "eagle eye" rockets in Gaza) plus another four that are located in Dahlan's personal compound.

13. (C) Comment: West Bank sources speculate that Rashid Abu Shbak, who openly flouts Nasir Yusif's authority, will be promoted to a powerless position, if not immediately, then soon. They also doubt that Abu Shbak could possibly unseat incumbent West Bank PSO head Ziad Hib al-Rih. Speculation remains open as to whether Sliman Hillis or Ribhi Arafat replaces Musa Arafat as the head of Public Security in Gaza.

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